

Budgeting is about setting priorities. The FY 2016 budget adopted by the Board of Commissioners on Tuesday was laser focused on two of Cobb County's highest priorities –to lower taxes and provide excellent public safety services that support a safe environment and the highest quality of life for Cobb County residents. The adopted budget reduces property taxes to pre-recession levels and includes a \$197 million investment in public safety.

I am proud that we have been able to reduce property taxes for Cobb property owners twice in the last 3 months. I made a commitment to Cobb County taxpayers that within five years or when the tax digest recovered, whichever came first, I would restore the millage rate to pre-recession levels. I said I would do it and I did.

Similarly, in 2014, the Board of Commissioners put their unanimous support behind a multi-year public safety plan. This plan involved putting 80 additional officers on the street and implementing policies and practices that ensure Cobb County has the ability to recruit and retain of the best and brightest. The budget adopted by the Board of Commissioners fully funds this commitment.

This budget contains a \$197 million investment in public safety. This makes up 56 percent of the entire general fund budget. This includes funding for 40 additional police officers and education and shift differential pay in both the Sheriff's Office and the Police Department. The adopted budget also supports four academy classes annually, compared to just two in the past. This provides the leadership team an opportunity to speed up the process of backfilling positions.

Unfortunately, instead of a factual policy debate, some are trying to distract the media and voters by focusing on the "process" and how the budget was actually put together. I want to make it clear today that I did propose to the Board a budget for commissioners to review, amend and adopt.

In fact, the Chairman is required by law to propose a budget. I submitted a budget on August 11 and the commissioners had four weeks to review and respond. This year actually allowed more time for commissioners to respond than most other years I have been on the commission. All of the commissioners were asked to provide input and offer changes. Three commissioners chose to work constructively in the process and discuss and recommend specific changes.

Commissioners are involved in the budget process throughout the entire year with almost every decision we make. It is our responsibility to the taxpayers to be active in this process and offer suggestions every single time we take a vote and make a commitment. Commissioner Ott has been very vocal about his criticism of the budget process. However, when offered the opportunity to provide input about what he would change, he declined to provide specifics. Commissioner Ott's public comments would require us to either raise taxes or dramatically cut spending and he has refused to provide the public with his specific recommendations on how to do either. Constructive criticism is always welcome but it is easier to address when it is accompanied by constructive solutions.

I am proud of the Boards action to adopt a fiscally conservative, balanced budget that both reduces taxes and enhances public safety. I am encouraged by the fact that this budget was based on the third consecutive year of a tax digest increase. I am confident that increasing property values are a great indicator of what is to come. The budget adopted on Tuesday mirrors the progress that we are making and I am excited about what this progress means for the future of Cobb County.

Timothy D. Lee

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Timothy D. Lee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Timothy" being more prominent and the last name "Lee" ending in a long, sweeping tail.

Chairman, Cobb County